

# **SONGS OF DISCORD: BALLADS OF REVOLUTION AND REVOLT**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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Submitted to Honors and Undergraduate Research  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as an

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

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May 2015

Major: English (Rhetoric)  
Psychology

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## **ABSTRACT**

Songs of Discord: Ballads of Revolution and Revolt. (May 2015)

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Born out of an oral tradition, the ballad remained for centuries a way of passing information and instilling social mores. Their wide use in the public sphere made the ballad a conducive medium for propaganda in times of war. This thesis seeks to explore why ballads have been such an effective tool of musical propaganda, looking specifically at their context and structure. In examining war ballads specifically from times of revolution and revolt, a general trend in pronoun usage begins to reveal itself. Over all, these ballads tend to use first person plural pronouns more frequently and more abundantly than ballads in times of peace. This trend found cross-culturally in ballads of revolution and revolt suggests, along with supporting research, that the presence of first person plural pronouns is a major contributing factor to the widespread and ongoing success of ballads during times of war.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to extend a huge amount of thanks to my advisor Dr. Wollock for introducing me to the subject of ballads and for guiding my journey through the discourse. Her vast knowledge of the subject material and unending encouragement proved an invaluable resource, without which this project could never have been completed. Likewise, I would also like to thank the Glasscock Center for Humanities Research for providing the Glasscock Undergraduate Research Scholar Summer Program and allowing me to become acquainted with the study of ballads and pursue my research topic. I would also like to express my gratitude towards Florence Davies and Lauren McAuliffe for the University Writing Center for their help throughout the completion of this project. Lastly, I would like to thank my fellow Glasscock Summer Scholars for being such a great support network and providing endless comments and feedback. This project could not have been completed without all of this support and I am very grateful for all of the assistance and support along the way.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The Ballad**

The history of the ballad is deeply emerged in an oral tradition. Passed down through the generations, ballads worked to instill certain virtues and social mores throughout a culture. These ballads also served as a way of communicating information, whether it be the death of a king or the brave acts of a knight (Fowler). In this manner, ballads served two main functions: communicating facts and instructing behavior, all passed on through word-of-mouth, leaving these ballads susceptible to adapt to the standards of a particular culture.

With the evolution of technology, ballads began to be written down and published on broadsides, a single sheet of paper sold for about a penny in the streets of every town. The peddlers selling these broadsides would sing them or play their tune, as to attract customers and deliver the entirety of the ballad beyond just the lyrics. Even with relatively low literacy rates, broadsides were still commonly sold and posted in windows or on shop fronts (Fowler). This aided in the standardization of ballads, as well as in their widespread distribution.

Likewise, the low cost of ballads and their tendency to be sung in taverns or in the village square made ballads widely popular amongst the poor and the common, everyday man. Balladry became a common source of entertainment in everyday life. This commonality allowed ballads to form the perfect medium for musical propaganda.

Used as early as in 9th century China, musical propaganda became a way of subtly spreading a message or idea throughout a population in the form of music (Cowell, 9-13). When joined with musical propaganda, the commonality and popularity of ballads serves as way to repeat certain ideas in the public repeatedly, often encouraging the audience of the message to take part in the discourse by singing along. With war and political turmoil continuing throughout history, the ballad was used to instill a sense of patriotism and a will to fight in the common, everyday man (Fowler).

This research seeks to look within the structure of the ballad itself for an explanation of the ballad's widespread success as musical propaganda. Initial findings looking at the language structure of ballads revealed a universal trend in pronouns usage consistent with the functions of ballads as musical propaganda.

## **Pronouns**

Upon investigation, a reoccurring pattern of pronoun use in ballads during times of war began to emerge. Pronouns are small words that stand in for nouns, falling under the category of function words. On their own, function words carry little meaning and rely on their context to supply meaning. The work of Dr. James Pennebaker explores the everyday use of function words and what they can reveal about real world social and psychological processes, looking specifically at speaker and audience interaction. As a whole, Pennebaker's research has been successful in identifying patterns of pronoun use and the ability of pronouns to communicate additional messages outside of their grammatical structure.

Pronouns and function words play a significant role in verbal communication, accounting for almost half of our spoken words (Pennebaker). Understanding of pronouns occurs in children as young as two, often being one of the first grammatical structures understood by children (Childers & Tomasello). First person pronouns in particular become especially salient to young children. In their 2001 experiment, Childers and Tomasello found that 100% of children two years old used either “I” or “me” in their spontaneous utterances. These results found by Childers and Tomasello demonstrate that in the earliest development of language pronouns and first-person pronouns in particular are present and shape not only a child’s understanding of language, but the child’s understanding of the world around them. In other words, pronouns and the ideas represented by pronouns help frame one’s perception of the world around them, beginning at a crucial age in child development.

While the grammatical structure of pronouns is learned at an early age, a deeper and subconscious understanding of pronouns continues to grow into adulthood. In his iconic 1988 study, Dr. Russell Belk developed the concept of the extended self, where one’s self-identity can come from things external to the self, such as material possessions. Since then, many marketing studies have looked at the relationship between first person pronouns used in advertisements and the consumer’s concept of the extended self. In 2013, researchers Kachersky and Palermo examined the role of placing “I” or “my” within a product name, such as the familiar iPhone or MySpace. The use of these first person pronouns pulls the consumer into the narrative, allowing them to imagine themselves using the brand or product. As a whole, consumer in the experiments containing first person plural pronouns gave the products higher ratings, were more likely to remember the product’s name, and were more likely to purchase it. The use of first

person pronouns in a product were found to have a profound psychological effect on the individual and were found to be successful in shaping both thought process and behavior.

The psychological effects of first person pronoun use can be extended to first person plural pronouns as well. In his book *Secret Life of Pronouns*, Dr. Pennebaker examines the conditions in which first person plural pronouns are used and what they communicate to an audience. When looking specifically at the usage of first person plural pronouns, Pennebaker concludes that first person plural pronouns are used primarily by leaders and people in positions of authority, often when trying to motivate someone or have them perform a certain task. Likewise, the use of inclusive first person plural pronouns tends to indicate group belonging and an extension of one's self-identity to a larger entity.

The psychological and sociological implications of pronouns play a large part in verbal communication. As a whole, ballads thrive on oral transmission. The verbal exchange between the performers and the audience give a unique platform to the communication of pronouns within the medium.

### **Pronouns in Ballads**

Little research has been done regarding pronoun use in ballads, however, the research that has been conducted is in line with research into the psychology of pronouns. When examining ballads from the English Civil War era, Dr. Elizabeth Cecconi discovered what she deemed the "I-narrator." The I-narrator is the ever-present narrator of the ballad, who more commonly than



not, is denoted simply by the pronoun “I.” This narrator may or may not be involved in the action occurring in the ballad, but is always the one telling the story.

The significance of the I-narrator lies in the oral nature of ballads. Ballads were not just read, but sung. As one is singing a ballad, the I-narrator takes on a new meaning as the performer becomes the “I”, fully integrating the speaker into the message. Dr. David Fowler calls this action the “intrapersonal mode of discourse,” where beliefs held by the I-narrator in the ballad are transferred to the performer through the function of pronouns. The more a person sings in the ballad that they believe a certain cause, the more likely they are to adopt this belief onto themselves.

When examining war ballads from this time period onwards, it was observed that while the use of “I” was common in many ballads, the use of first person plural pronouns seemed to emerge more frequently when looking at ballads of revolution and revolt. While the I-narrator was still a common feature of the ballad, the presence of the pronoun “we” or “our” was observed to be similarly as common in the ballads of revolution and revolt.

The presence of the I-narrator and the presence of first person plural pronouns both serve to include the performer into the discourse of the ballad, functioning as an intrapersonal mode of discourse. However, the first person plural pronouns in particular should also serve to include the audience as well as the performer.

I hypothesize that the intrapersonal mode of discourse can be expanded on a cultural level, where pronoun use within ballads can be used to help instill an in-group dynamic amongst the singers and audience. To support this claim, I will examine first person plural pronoun use in ballads from times of revolution and revolt, ballads from times of general warfare, and ballads from times of peace to examine pronoun use on a scale of conflict—where times of peace represent low cultural conflict, general warfare represents moderate cultural conflict, and revolution or revolt represents high cultural conflict. If my hypothesis is correct, pronoun use should directly correlate with the amount of cultural conflict. Therefore, ballads in times of revolution and revolt should use these pronouns at the highest frequency and highest rate, followed by ballads in times of general warfare and lastly ballads in times of peace.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHODS**

Over 400 ballads were collected and analyzed across cultural and geographical regions, including ballads from the United States, England, Scotland, Wales, Russia, France, Poland, Chile, Argentina, Cuba, and Thailand. These ballads were then divided into two groups: a focus group and a control group. Ballads from times of revolution and revolt and ballads from times of general warfare served as a focus group, while ballads in times of peace serve as the control. Ballads in the control group stem from the same cultural background as ballads in the focus group. However, due to the oral nature of ballads and the difficulty in dating them (without direct mention of a certain event), control ballads will not necessarily come from a time of peace surrounding the revolution or revolt. This is not thought to have a significant impact on the data, as ballads tend to have a long lifespan and long cultural impact, up to hundreds of years, making the time of their creation less relevant. The ballads surveyed were collected from many different private collections, online replications, and publically accessible audio files. Different versions of the same ballad were analyzed only if there was a significant difference between the multiple versions.

Ballads in both groups were first analyzed for presence of a first person plural pronoun. If even one first person plural pronoun is used anywhere in the ballad, it is marked as containing first person plural pronouns. Likewise, the rate of occurrence in these pronouns was also recorded, comparing the usage of first person plural pronouns to the usage of other pronouns throughout the ballad. If a ballad has over a nine percent rate of first person plurals, it is said to have a

significant presence of first person plurals. Nine percent was chosen as the cutoff line as first person plural pronouns make up nine percent of all pronouns at the highest margin. Lastly, ballads are examined for a we-they dichotomy, which exists where a ballad presents two clear distinct sides, utilizing both first person plural and third person plural pronouns to present two separate, combative sides.

Based on preliminary findings, it is expected that the wartime ballads and general ballads share a similar presence of first person plural pronouns, assuring that use of these pronouns is not due in part to a time or cultural effect. It is suspected that ballads from the focus group will have a slightly greater presence of first person plural pronouns than ballads in the control due to the nature of their subjects, but this difference will not be too large. Conversely, it is expected that the focus ballads will have a much larger rate of first person plural usage than the control ballads, demonstrating that this type of heavy pronoun usage is unique to war ballads. Lastly, it is predicted that the findings will reflect a higher rate of first person plural use in ballads with a we-they dichotomy, as the dichotomy mimics the combative nature of war. Together, these three aspects suggest that a high usage of first person plural pronouns is unique to war ballads and contributes to their ability to motivate and unite people in a common cause.

In analyzing these three dimensions of pronoun use in balladry, the function of the pronoun within the ballad can be broken down and quantified. The combination of all three expected results will suggest an underlying psychology of the ballad. Through this analysis, the pronouns within the ballad transcend the traditional form of pronouns and adopt the function of the ballads content. Instead of serving as a placeholder for a noun, the pronoun serves as a placeholder of the

ballad's message, communicating a spirit of unification and uprising through every use. Without these three components, there is not sufficient evidence to lay claim to the greater purpose of the pronoun within the ballad.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESULTS**

All Ballads were examined for presence, rate of usage, and presence of a we-they dichotomy. Presence was dummy coded as a categorical variable where a ballad could be either positive or negative for presence—having at least one first person plural pronoun or absent of all first person plural pronouns. Rate of usage was measured on a ratio scale, comparing the rate of first person plural pronouns to the amount of other pronouns used throughout the ballad. The rate of first person plural pronoun use includes ballads where first person plural pronouns were both present and absent. Lastly, the we-they dichotomy was also coded as a categorical variable, where the dichotomy was either present or absent throughout the ballad. In any ballad containing at least two lines where a we-they pronoun exchange occurred, successively or not, a we-they dichotomy was considered present.

#### **Control**

Ballads in the control group closely mimicked that of the expected results. Coding for presence, 64% of ballads in times of peace contained at least one first person plural pronoun. In other words, the majority of ballads contain at least one first person plural pronoun. This result demonstrates that these pronouns, in their symbolic concept, are not culture-, region-, or time-specific. Looking across multiple countries during different times, the presence of at least one first person plural pronoun remained fairly consistent and common. The rate that these pronouns occur in peace ballads was low, averaging around 3% of total pronoun use. Keeping in mind that first person plural pronouns consist of 4-9% of total pronoun use, depending on the language, a

3% first person plural rate is fairly consistent with the typical grammatical boundaries. Especially considering this statistic averages pronoun use from ballads with no first person plural pronouns present, the rate of pronoun usage fits cleanly between this window. Lastly, control ballads were analyzed for a we-they dichotomy. However, the we-they dichotomy was virtually absent from control ballads, where no ballad clearly met the criteria of the we-they dichotomy, and few nearly-met the criteria. Because of this, the we-they dichotomy in the focus groups were not compared to the control.

### **General Warfare**

To test the hypothesis, ballads from times of war were compared to ballads from times specifically in a revolution or revolt. Ballads from general warfare included ballads about any war that could not be classified as a revolution or a revolt. As such, civil wars were not included in analysis. Ballads from general warfare spanned a similar time frame of ballads from revolution and revolt, starting in the 1500s and continuing to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Overall, 81% of ballads in times of general warfare contained at least one first person plural pronoun, significantly more than the control group. While this difference is statistically significant, it is not very large, supporting the notion that there is no cultural or temporal difference in pronoun usage. When observing the rate of first person plural pronoun usage, 18% of all pronouns in the war ballads were first person plurals, significantly more than the 3% in the control group,  $t_{(149)}=6.37$ ,  $p<.0001$ . Lastly, when analyzing the ballads for a we-they dichotomy, a significant difference in pronoun use was found in ballads that contained a we-they dichotomy

( $M=32$ ), and ballads that did not ( $M=18$ ),  $F_{(1,37)}=5.06$ ,  $p<.05$ . Ballads not containing a single first person plural pronoun were not included in analysis.

## **Revolution and Revolt**

Ballads included in analysis spanned multiple revolutions and revolts across history. Many revolutionary ballads surveyed originated during the American Revolution, French Revolution, Cuban Revolution, and Russian Revolutions of 1917. However, many of the ballads surveyed during these times about these revolutions are from countries outside the country of revolution. The results of the ballads from these major revolutions are found below. The data from ballads outside of these revolutions can be seen in the overall results.

### *American Revolution*

The American Revolution occurred between 1765 and 1783 as a struggle between the thirteen American colonies and British rule. The Battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775 marked the first military engagement of the war. The ballads surveyed include battles of rising tension from the early 1760s and range until a few years after the war in 1786. The peak of these ballads remains during times of active military engagement from 1775 to 1783. Ballads from the American Revolution included ballads from both the loyalist and revolutionary perspective, including both ballads written in the Americas and ballads written in Great Britain. No significant difference was found between the two perspectives in presence of pronouns, rate of pronoun-use, or presence of a we-they dichotomy.



In comparing the presence of first person plural pronouns, I found there was a significant difference between ballads of the American Revolution (89%) and my control group (64%),  $\chi^2_{(1,150)}=5.89, p<.01$ . While this difference is statistically significant, it is likewise not necessarily a large difference. Overall, American Revolutionary ballads averaged a rate of 25% of all pronouns used being first person plural pronouns, a significantly larger rate than ballads in the control group (3% of all pronouns),  $t_{(149)}=7.95, p<.0001$ . This result also had a very large effect size,  $e=.7$ .

Lastly, I analyzed the American Revolution ballads for the presence of a we-they dichotomy. An independent samples t-test revealed that there was a significant effect of the we-they dichotomy presence on rate of pronoun use. Looking at only ballads containing first person plural pronouns, those also containing a we-they dichotomy ( $M=33\%$ ) used significantly more first person plural pronouns than those not containing this dichotomy ( $M=22\%$ ),  $t_{(69)}=2.24, p<.05$ . Ballads in the control group could not be compared, as no we-they dichotomy was found.

### *French Revolution*

Ballads included in this analysis spanned many geographic areas throughout Europe in response to the French Revolution. Few loyalist or anti-revolution ballads were found to be written in France, however, surrounding countries and colonies still under a monarchy sparked a widespread creation of ballads denouncing the French Revolution and discouraging their subjects from acting in a similar manner as the French populace. Wales in particular saw a rise of anti-revolutionary ballads discouraging all revolutions, but especially the French Revolution. While ballads about the French Revolution were analyzed as one group, no significant effects of either

country of origin or side were found to have a significant effect on presence of pronouns, rate of pronoun, or presence of a we-they dichotomy.

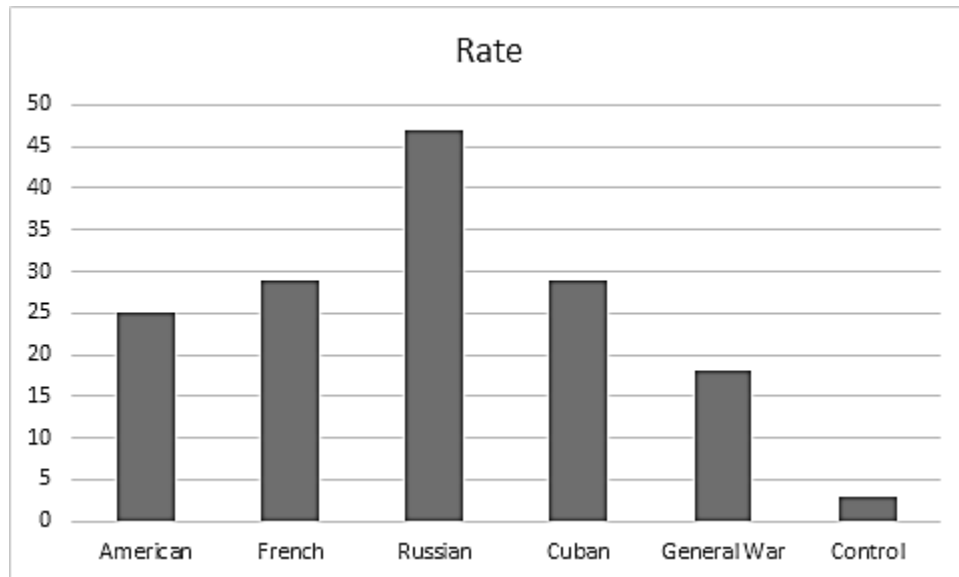
Ballads about the French Revolution contained the highest presence of first person plural pronouns, where 94% of ballads surveyed contained these pronouns while 6% did not. Likewise, first person plural pronouns in ballads of the French Revolution on average made up 29% of all pronoun usages, significantly differing from the control ( $M=3\%$ ). Lastly, there was a significant effect of presence of a we-they dichotomy on pronoun use, as ballads containing this dichotomy ( $M=42\%$ ) used first person plural pronouns significantly more frequently than ballads which did not ( $M=27\%$ ),  $t_{(50)}= 2.20$ ,  $p<.05$ .

### *Russian Revolutions of 1917*

Including the February Revolution and October Revolution, or Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian Revolutions of 1917 marked the end of Imperial and Provisional Government in Russia and began the rise of a communist Russia. Ballads surveyed include the months leading up to the revolutions, beginning in 1916, and span until a few years after until 1919.

Ballads from the Russian Revolutions of 1917 displayed slightly different results. Like ballads of the two revolutions before them, 93% of these ballads contained first person plural pronouns while 7% did not. However, these pronouns made up almost half, 47%, of all pronouns used throughout the ballad. When removing ballads that do not contain any first person plural pronouns, this number jumps to around 55%. Figure 1 demonstrates these results in comparison to the other revolutionary groups. However, there is no evidence in the data to support the

significance of a we-they dichotomy. I believe this is due to the small sample size of ballads of the Russian Revolutions containing a we-they dichotomy, moderated by the ceiling effect of many of these ballads containing only a small number of pronouns, and from there mostly first person plural pronouns.



**Figure 1:** The rate of first person plural pronouns to total pronoun usage by key groups.

The large disparity in rate of these first person plural pronouns is most likely due in part by the nature of these revolutions. While initially this difference was thought to be cultural, it should be noted that while these ballads are about the Russian Revolution, they come from many countries outside of Russia, including the United States. Therefore, this difference in pronoun usage is not due to a linguistic or cultural difference, as both culture and language is controlled with the inclusion of non-Russian ballads. Instead, I believe the rate of pronouns is amplified by the amount of division and greater need for group identification. The Russian Revolutions of 1917 were not only a political revolution, but an economic revolution as well. Disparities between both one's political beliefs and economic theory were combined, creating an even greater

division amongst those who, for all intents and purposes, were similar due to culture and geographical location. Therefore, the need to establish oneself as a separate group magnified and is reflected in the language of the ballads through pronoun use.

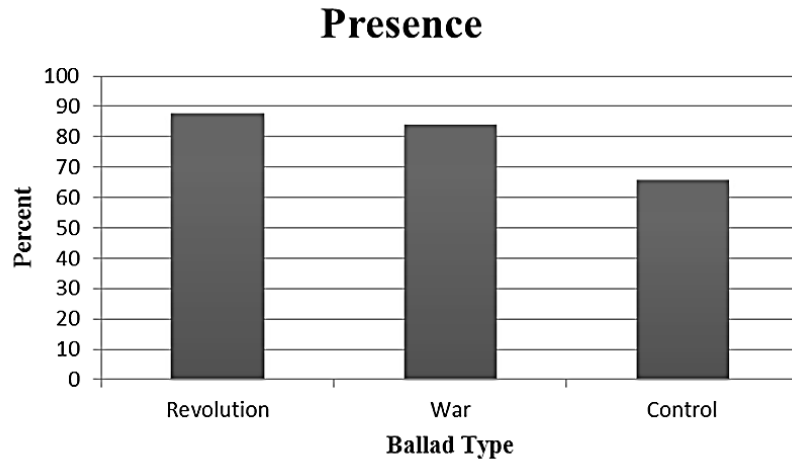
### *Cuban Revolution*

The Cuban Revolution spanned from July 1953, ending with the removal of Fulgenico Batista in 1959. Ballads examined spanned the length of the revolution, but did not continue on to 1965 with Communist Party reform.

Ballads from the Cuban Revolution of 1953 contained first person plural pronouns 80% of the time, while 20% of these ballads did not. While this number is the lowest of all the focus groups, it still significantly differs from the control. Overall, the rate of first person plural pronouns compared to all pronoun usage was 29%, similarly differing from the control like the other revolutionary ballad groups. Similarly, an independent samples t-test showed that ballads containing a we-they dichotomy ( $M=54\%$ ) contained a significantly higher rate of first person plural pronoun usage than ballads ( $M=22\%$ ),  $t_{(33)}=3.24$ ,  $p<.01$ .

### *Overall*

When comparing presence of first person plural pronouns in each of my three groups, I found that 86% of revolutionary ballads used first person plural pronouns, while 81% of war ballads and 66% of ballads in the control also used these pronouns. While these percentages are statistically significant, they have a small effect size. Figure 2 displays these results.

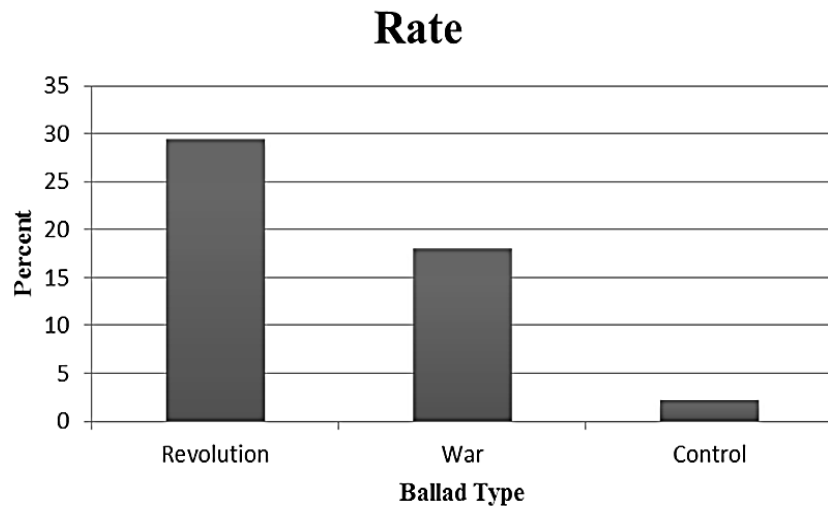


**Figure 2:** Presence of first person plural pronouns in ballads.

These results suggest that while ballads in times of war, be it revolutionary or otherwise, use first person plural pronouns more often than ballads in times of peace, these pronouns are not exclusively used by them and instead can be found in the majority of all other ballads. This is actually a very positive result to have. Had the difference been extremely large, it would have suggested that the difference in pronoun use may have stemmed from a generational or time difference between the three groups instead of a difference in function. Instead, the data reflects that when ballads serve the function of musical propaganda (as they do in both focus groups), they are more likely to contain first person plural pronouns than when they do not, but this difference is most likely explained by the difference in function rather than other possible cultural, temporal, or linguistic differences.

The differences between the three groups in pronoun use become vastly more apparent when looking at the rate of first person plural pronoun use. An ANOVA revealed that there was a significant difference in rate of pronoun use between the revolutionary group ( $M=30\%$ ), the

general war group ( $M=18\%$ ), and the control group ( $M=2\%$ ),  $F_{(2, 404)}=47.77$ ,  $p<.0001$ . Figure 3 demonstrates this difference in rate between the three groups.

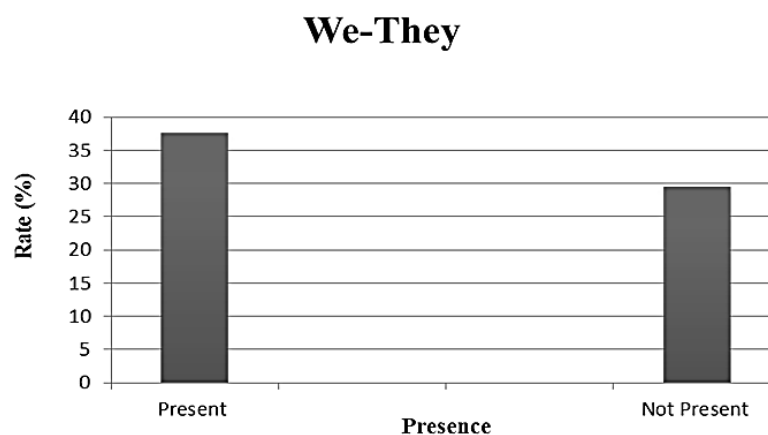


**Figure 3:** Differences in rate of first person plural pronouns to total pronoun usage.

These large differences between the groups demonstrate that first person plural pronouns occur largely in ballads during times of war. Keeping in mind that first person plural pronouns make up only about 4-9% of total pronouns, this difference becomes even more salient. Likewise, the significant difference between the two focus groups suggests that pronoun use is directly tied to the need for group identification and internal struggle. During general warfare, one's group identity is already established and tied to one's country. However, during revolution or revolt, the country's group identity fractures and new identities begin to emerge. These results suggest that the greater the struggle, the more first person plural pronouns would be used. Furthermore, when analyzing where the highest rate of first person plural pronoun usage occurs in revolutionary ballads, it is found in revolutions with the most strife—containing both significant

political and economic reform. The more division amongst a populace, the more need to create a solidified group identity, leading to more first person plural pronouns in ballads.

Lastly, I analyzed ballads in the focus groups for presence of a we-they dichotomy, which was virtually absent in the control group. Using ballads only found to contain first person plural pronouns, an ANOVA demonstrated that there is a significant difference in the amount of first person plural pronouns used between ballads that contain a we-they dichotomy ( $M=38\%$ ) and ballads that do not ( $M=30\%$ ),  $F_{(1, 256)}=5.761, p<.01$ . These results can be seen in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** Rate of first person plural usage in ballads by presence of we-they dichotomy.

Though by definition, ballads containing a we-they dichotomy must allot a significant portion of their pronouns to third person plural pronouns, these ballads overall contain more first person plurals than ballads that do not. The we-they dichotomy serves as a literal representation of in-group, out-group dynamics, and when combined with messages of war, these ballads represent the struggle of war through the grammatical structure of the ballad. As ballads containing this

dichotomy structurally recreate these ideas, the results support the conclusion that first person plural pronouns can reinforce group identity amongst the performers and audience of a ballad.

When looking at these ballads, the results that were not significant are equally as important as what results were. When using an ANOVA, no significant difference was found in either side or country of origin. Whether a ballad was written from a revolutionary or loyalist perspective had no effect on presence of first person plural pronouns, rate of usage, or presence of a we-they dichotomy. Likewise, ballads originating from different countries had no substantive significance in their usage of first person plural pronouns, ruling out geographical and cultural explanations for variations in these results.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Implications and Significance**

Consistent trends in the data across time, culture, and language reveal a distinct pattern on pronoun usage amongst ballads from times of war that is absent in ballads from times of peace. As a whole, ballads from times of war use first person pronouns more often, more frequently, and are much more likely to utilize the pronouns in a way which constructs a we-they dichotomy within the grammatical structure of the ballad than in ballads from times of peace. Likewise, these trends similarly vary when comparing wars of different internal strife. The more a war challenges a group's identity, such as a revolution or revolt, the more the ballads from this war are likely to use first person plural pronouns more often, more frequently, and in a way that creates a we-they dichotomy. The greater the amount of internal strife and need for identity, the more pronounced these patterns become, as ballads from revolutions including both political and economic disputes tended to show increased use in first person plural pronouns.

The need for identification becomes especially salient in times of war. No longer can one's life be focused on the individual self, but instead one must take into consideration the needs of the many. War efforts are not the task of the individual, but rather the products of a community as a whole, bonding individuals together to fight for a common cause. It is unsurprising then that the common use of first person singular pronouns found in the form of the I-narrator within ballads takes a dramatic shift to the first person plural during ballads in times of war. Likewise, the need for identification changes within the context of the war. In general warfare, one's self-

identification shifts to include that of others. A soldier can identify with his comrades, his country, and the overall cause for which he fights. However, these aspects are predefined and the need to create and establish an identity does not exist.

When examining identification from wars of revolt or revolution, this does not hold true.

Revolutions and revolts tend to occur as a break from an already established group. Whether it is the members of the thirteen American colonies separating from England or the Bolsheviks separating from imperialist Russia, self-contained group identities are not predetermined and must be formed through more direct means. The revolutionary cannot depend on his nationality and ties to a country to form identity, and instead must forge on through his ideals. Because of this, the need for identification is greater during revolutions than not only times of peace, but in times of general warfare as well. Seeing an increase in first person plural pronoun usage in ballads specifically from times of revolution and revolt links pronoun use to this internal need of identification for both the individual and society at large.

The findings contained within this study are consistent with the extant research on both pronouns and ballads alike, suggesting that ballads indeed reflect the need for group identification, and in turn, play a role in creating a solidified identity. However, they also raise questions and support conclusions outside the general scope of concrete results. This study primarily examines the role of pronouns in ballads, but its results can be extended to look at how meaning is translated in the form of ballads.

Traditionally, it is thought that the meaning of a ballad is translated through its content, as many of the ballads hold the same tune, rhyme scheme, and meter. However, if pronouns can help create and reinforce group identity, then meaning can also come from grammatical structure. Pronouns by themselves hold little intrinsic meaning. They function as placeholders, linguistic symbols meant to represent another word. In including pronouns, the ballad does not change its content as a whole. “We” could just as easily be replaced by “Americans” in a revolutionary ballad, while “they” could be replaced with “the opposition” without changing the overall meaning of the ballad. But this is not the case. War ballads consistently use first person plural pronouns significantly more so than ballads in times of peace, even though the general concepts the pronouns represent are present in both (i.e. the concept of self, “I,” and others “they”). First person plural pronouns are included in war ballads because they symbolize something in their use; their grammatical function in itself provides additional meaning to the ballad.

This concept is represented in the data by the presence of the we-they dichotomy. When a we-they dichotomy is present, it grammatically recreates the struggle of war within the structure and context of the ballad. Overall, the we-they dichotomy is not present in ballads from times of peace. Even though first person plural pronouns are included in the majority of peace ballads, and likewise for third person plural pronouns, these two pronouns do not interact, much less so in a manner that creates two distinctively separate groups. The we-they dichotomy is exclusive to ballads from times of war, just as the conflict of battle is likewise war-exclusive. The fact that the ballads containing the we-they dichotomy end up using a higher rate of first person plural pronouns than ones that do not, reinforce the idea of pronouns serving both as a means of

recreating struggle and reinforcing identity. When pronouns are used in this manner, they allow the message of the ballad to be transmitted through more than just the content alone.

This idea of pronouns being able to communicate meaning in their grammatical structure relates to Noam Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar. According to Chomsky, there are some grammatical structures that are innate to all humans, representing the "essence of human language." Universal Grammar looks primarily at the structural components of language and interactions between subject and predicate. One of the functions that has been overlooked in Universal Grammar is that of pronouns. Every single language contains the concept of pronouns. While linguists make the distinction that some language are pro-drop (e.g. Spanish, Italian), the concept of the pronoun still exists within the language itself and within the form and function of verb endings. Of all the languages sampled within this study, every one contained the concept of a first person plural pronoun. Likewise, in pro-drop languages, there exist special verb conjugations used to designate the concept of first person plural. However, even within pro-drop languages using specific verb conjugations, the speaker can still choose whether or not to include the pronoun.

The fact that pronouns may exist as a concept in every single language is certainly a significant one. This study taps into the possible significance of pronouns themselves, though more exploration is warranted. Specifically, the function of first person plural pronouns is explored, concluding that these pronouns exist in every language surveyed and are fairly common in their use. However, the extent to which these pronouns are used carries an inherent meaning in itself, suggesting that pronouns may universally hold a more specific function in language than

originally thought. This study supports this conclusion, though more research would need to be conducted before drawing a definite conclusion.

Together, these results speak to the psychology of pronouns and their role in both ballads and everyday language. The ballad is unique in that it is sung in groups, increasing the potential for group identification in pronouns, but its functions can be translated into language as a whole. Though originating quite some time ago, ballads continue to exist in our everyday lives, functioning as many things from entertainment to musical propaganda.

In 2014, ballads took the global stage as General Prayuth Chan-ocha, leader of the military junta in Thailand, created a ballad entitled *Retuning Happiness to the People*. This ballad was performed across the nation and publically televised in order to calm rising tensions surrounding the military coup. *Returning Happiness to the People* contained all of the elements examined in this study, boosting an impressive first person plural pronoun rate of 62%. Ballads and musical propaganda as a whole are still very active elements in our modern day society. In analyzing war ballads, we can understand not only what makes them effective but why. This study suggests that the use of first person plural pronouns may hold the key, replicating struggle and enforcing group dynamics through the grammatical framework of the ballad.

### **Additional Results**

The implication of universal pronoun use in ballads is an exciting discovery that has the potential to answer many questions in the study of ballads. One such prevailing question is the notion of the Child Ballads as being impersonal. As one of the most famous and extensive ballad

collections, the Child Ballads have long remarked to have an impersonal feel, though the reasoning behind this tone has been largely obscured. This study suggests a possible explanation—pronoun use. Using many ballads from the Child collection in the control group, the Child Ballads overall use very few first person plural pronouns. Likewise, the ones that contain the most first person plural pronouns tell the tale of famous battles and are about war. Though not extensively examined in this study, the lack of first person pronoun use in the Child Ballads may be an explanation for their impersonal feel.

In studying over 400 ballads, some results not directly pertinent to the study of pronouns also revealed themselves. A common thought in the study of ballads is their one-way transatlantic travel from Europe to America. Ballads moving from Europe, England specifically, to America has been a well-documented occurrence. It is commonly believed that this transfer of ballads is exclusively one directional and that ballads did not come from America back to Europe.

The exploration required for the analysis of this study revealed otherwise. Many ballads originating in America during the Revolutionary War were found to have eventually made their way to England. This transportation of ballads can clearly be seen through the creation of parody ballads. Parody ballads are ballads that are replications of other ballads, but are altered in some way to present a message opposite of the one included in the original ballad. These ballads tend to keep much of the phrasing and rhyme scheme of the original ballad, changing only the words pertinent to the overall message of the ballad. Parody ballads were a common occurrence in both England and the thirteen colonies during the American Revolution. Expectedly, many parody ballads in the United States parodied ballads originally written in England. However, my studies

revealed that the opposite was also true. Parody ballads occurring in England were also found to be responses to ballads originally occurring in America. While perhaps that majority of ballad transmission occurs west across the Atlantic, there is evidence to support that ballads likewise transferred back east.

### **Looking Forward**

This study is just an introductory examination into the roles of pronouns in ballads. In order to gather more information and make causal inferences, a case study or experimentation must be conducted. Conflicts in the Middle East and future revolutions may yield an exclusive insight into the subtleties of revolutionary song, noting specifically for time effects. While time as a whole is not thought to be a variable on pronoun use, seeing when a ballad was formed or primarily sung within the context of a revolution could reveal interesting results. Due to the complications with oral transmission, it is often difficult to place exact dates on a ballad's creation, making ex post facto analysis difficult.

Similarly, a more complex psychological analysis of ballads through experimentation might lead to results incapable of being analyzed through text alone. A study could be conducted to directly measure a ballad's effectiveness, to see if using first person plural pronouns leads to a causal effect of group identity, or if the causal arrow is reversed and strong in-group dynamics simply lead to a greater use of first person plural pronouns, or if both are true, which then speaks to the regenerative power of ballads in creating and enforcing group identity. Similarly, it would be informative to examine the role of participation with a ballad—singing versus listening—and its

effects on group identity. Is simply listening to or reading a ballad enough to invoke an intrapersonal mode of discourse, or must the ballad be sung in order for these results to emerge?

The intersection of literature and psychology is a burgeoning field of study that is just now gaining interest. The results found in this study not only present insight into the function of pronouns within the medium of the ballad, but a methodology for future studies. Much of research within English, specifically in literature, is qualitative instead of quantitative. While this type of research is invaluable to the field, its ability to draw generalizable conclusions is limited. The combination of literature and psychology calls for a more quantitative approach than previously conducted. This study serves as just one example of the ways both fields can be combined to examine a possible area of study.

The possibilities between the intersection of psychology and literature are endless. Examining the role pronouns play in ballads during times of revolution and revolt is just one example of the psychological mechanisms behind linguistic functions. Through observing the effects of pronouns on group identification, we can examine how certain linguistic and grammatical structures create and reinforce universal concepts across, time, geography, and culture.



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